

Base Closure Planning

by Lieutenant Colonel Leslie J. Pierce

In the early to mid-1990's, the Army experienced a huge drawdown of soldiers and installations throughout Europe. At most of the affected installations, tenant units were either moved en masse or disbanded when their soldiers departed on permanent changes of station (PCSs). Many tenant units turned over their installation and soldier support responsibilities to civilian employees, the local national workforce, or sister installations.

During the exodus of the tenant units and their soldiers, many functions ceased to be performed altogether, leaving units and out-processing soldiers to fend for themselves. This cessation of support was the result of poor planning or poor execution of the drawdown's intent. Many of the soldiers and leaders in the installation support functions appeared to be concerned only with getting themselves and their families off of the installation so they would not be left "holding the bag" when everyone else had gone. As a result, the remaining soldiers were left to care for themselves, clear the installation, and conduct the business of base closure. These soldiers often had to deal with a complex bureaucracy or seek assistance from other installations that were attempting to care for their own people with dwindling manpower and resources.

If the Army is serious about taking care of its soldiers and their families, especially during periods of turbulence and change, it must ensure a smooth transition during base closure. The Army should regard base closure as seriously as it regards any other military mission.

Preparation

Like other missions, base closure should be preceded by an operation order (OPORD), a synchronization matrix, and, most importantly, a command post exercise. The OPORD (with whatever title and format the commander chooses) naturally should identify the commander's intent as well as directives outlining the base closure requirements and standards.

The synchronization matrix must tie in all functions of installation and soldier support, such as personnel (adjutant general [AG] and civilian personnel), central issue facility, facility management (including housing), transportation, communications and information management, supply (including the central issue facility), health services, and installation security. Other issues such as environmental compliance requirements also should be addressed. The synchronization matrix also must include the establishment of ad hoc elements as units draw down or depart; these elements will be formed from soldiers who, for PCS or ETS (estimated time of separation) reasons, are left behind to support the base closure mission. Although a timeline directed by higher headquarters certainly will be associated with it, the synchronization matrix should be driven by

events. Unit departures and population drawdowns should be coordinated with major events when possible. For example, as installations close, consideration must be given to when the current school year or semester ends to minimize disruption of the education of dependent children.

During the drawdown in Germany, I realized that, had a rehearsal or a command post exercise (CPX) been performed before the actual drawdown, many of the problems we experienced would have surfaced, and we could have addressed the problems and implemented solutions for them. The CPX should be designed to test the base closure plan and allow time for OPORD rewrites, identify key positions and personnel (by name when possible), and stress the proper timing of critical events. If time allows, two CPXs could be held. The first should refine the initial OPORD and synchronization matrix and involve the key staff elements of each installation support activity. The second CPX should test the final plan and include all key personnel and their staffs as appropriate. An important goal of the second CPX is to let the subordinate staffs walk through their primary and secondary requirements, determine shortfalls, and test appropriate solutions.

Personnel

The command and control functions for base closure should be identified, and, if needed, a command and control unit or base closure force should be formed under the direction of the installation commander. Because of the ongoing missions of tenant units, some soldiers and civilian employees identified for base closure duties may have to transfer to the base closure force after their responsibilities in their parent units are handed off to others. As a control function, a modified stop-loss program must be considered so the PCS of soldiers directly or indirectly associated with the base closure can be compared to the events on the synchronization matrix, thus ensuring that the departure of the soldiers does not adversely affect the closure mission.

The installation AG and the Army Human Resources Command must carefully balance the drawdown mission against the assignment of the soldiers. During the drawdown in Germany, too many soldiers and key leaders coordinated with sympathetic Total Army Personnel Command (now Army Human Resources Command) career managers to obtain specific report dates to a gaining installation or a needed school in order to leave the installation (and their responsibilities) early. To those left behind, these actions drew a fine line between career enhancement and opportunism. During base closure, units and the installation AG must coordinate, control, and enforce soldiers' "depart not earlier than" dates.

If the Army is serious about taking care of its soldiers and their families, especially during periods of turbulence and change, it must ensure a smooth transition during base closure.

Installation out-processing procedures for soldiers should be made as simple as possible. For example, the Internet and Intranet should be used whenever possible instead of wasting valuable soldier man-hours just to obtain a rubber stamp on an out-processing checklist. Soldiers could be pre-cleared at the unit level to ensure command participation in those areas that involve money or potential Uniform Code of Military Justice action.

The civilian personnel office also should be included in the planning process. With advance coordination, civilian employees could be transferred to other offices to assist with the closure mission. The employment contracts of civilian and local national employees of installations outside of the continental United States should be coordinated so their jobs are ended or transferred in synchronization with the base closure plan. Incentives can be used to keep civilian employees at work until their duties and responsibilities are completed.

Central Issue Facility

To reduce the closure and transfer requirements of the central issue facility and ease the strain on the supply office at the gaining installations, soldiers could take their clothing and individual items listed in Common Table of Allowances (CTA) 50–900 with them when they PCS to their next installation. The clothing records, which are needed to maintain accountability, could be taken by the soldiers or sent electronically to the gaining installations. The closing units would have to validate the records and, if necessary, oversee the repayment process through cash collection vouchers or adjustment documents. The soldiers would deliver the validation documents to their new units and installations on arrival. CTA 50–900 issue items could be shipped to the next duty station as unaccompanied baggage or moved with the soldiers themselves as appropriate.

Soldiers selected for the base closure mission most likely will require noncommissioned officer evaluation reports and officer evaluation reports when they out-process. These soldiers should be given their end-of-tour awards before leaving their current units. The base closure mission can be viewed as a deployment and therefore a specific opportunity to excel. Soldiers can receive achievement awards and, if required by regulation, evaluations for their performance during the base closure.

Facility Management and Housing

The process of timing and coordinating the closing of buildings can be emotional and complicated. As soon as their office functions cease, unit facilities should be cleaned, secured, and turned over to the facility management office. Installation housing is, of course, more difficult to manage. A soldier's family could be allowed to stay in quarters until his PCS date, or the family could be allowed to depart the installation for the next duty station ahead of the soldier. If the family chooses to depart first, the soldier should be allowed time to escort his family to the next duty station, obtain appropriate housing, and return to the closing installation to fulfill the base closure mission. For this to work, the gaining installations should agree to put these soldiers at the top of the housing list.

Soldiers returning to complete the base closure mission could be housed together in barracks designated specifically for closure personnel. If this requires the soldiers to move more than once from their current barracks, they should be given a movement plan with approximate dates of transfer. Without a well-thought-out and well-publicized plan, the morale of the soldiers on the base closure team will quickly wane.

Transportation

Transportation requirements for supplies, vehicles, and household goods must be coordinated early enough to determine if local resources are sufficient to handle the volume. The transportation officer should coordinate with the central issue facility and with each unit to determine how much of the equipment to be moved requires secure transportation. Examples include weapons, communications equipment, computers, and classified documents.

Units that plan to depart en masse and take their vehicles and equipment with them to their new duty stations should be given an opportunity to send their vehicles to a maneuver area training equipment site or corps-level maintenance facility for upper-level maintenance or modifications, if required. Once the appropriate maintenance is performed, the vehicles then could be sent on to the gaining installation. This plan would eliminate the need for coordinating not only the move of the vehicles to a new installation but also the maintenance needed to bring them up to 10/20 standards.

Communications and Information Management

Consideration must be given to security of communications equipment and transmitted information. Networks should remain operational as long as possible to facilitate normal communication to the very last day. As buildings are closed, Internet and telephone jacks should be shut off to prohibit their unauthorized use.

Supplies and Equipment

Some supplies and equipment will, of course, remain with the units conducting the closure. For example, these units must have access to automation and communications

equipment until they depart or the base is actually closed. All other items can be transferred with the units as they depart, or they can be turned in to the installation property book office.

Health Services

Health service support should include not only the obvious medical and dental care but also veterinary care and preventive medicine. Medical and dental treatment facilities and missions should be drawn down to match the size of the installation population. Patient care and evacuation could be coordinated with off-post healthcare facilities or moved to a sister installation if the receiving hospitals or clinics have sufficient staffing, finances, and other resources to handle the new patients.

Before any significant drawdown or transfer of responsibility, the medical community must work diligently with the units and soldiers to complete required physicals, immunizations, and dental work for all remaining soldiers. Specific attention should be given to any known unique pharmaceutical requirements so the needs of the base closure personnel can be met without interrupting the supply of required prescription medicines. The obvious goals here are to minimize the disruption of healthcare for the population being served and to advertise the changes in healthcare that are being made.

Installation Security

Installation security should be a key concern since pillagers, vagrants, and squatters may attempt to take advantage of vacant facilities. To minimize vandalism and loss of equipment, installation security should be reinforced with additional military manpower and contract, local, or Federal law enforcement as appropriate.

Environment

Inspections should be conducted early on to identify any environmental cleanup or restoration work needed and to determine what work the soldiers can do and what must be contracted out. Units should include environmental work in their areas in their synchronization matrices and arrange for contract work to start as soon as possible.

The goal of base closure is to move all of the affected units, soldiers, families, and equipment to other installations while properly accounting for everything and everyone. Success will be determined by how well communication, coordination, synchronization, rehearsals, and execution are conducted in support of the mission. If commanders are willing to keep participating soldiers informed and assigned to worthwhile tasks, the base closure mission can be one of the most important and worthwhile missions they will ever perform. **ALOG**

Lieutenant Colonel Leslie J. (Chip) Pierce is the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel at the 18th Medical Command in Yongsan, Korea. During the drawdown in Europe, he was the Chief of the Personnel Actions Branch for the 7th Medical Command in Heidelberg, Germany. He has a master's degree in human resources management and is a graduate of the Army Command and General Staff College.